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**Rebuilding institutional legitimacy in post-conflict societies:
An Asia-Pacific Case Study, Interphase 1-2**

FA2386-10-1-0001 AOARD 104109,

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Abstract

This project aims to measure local perceptions of government legitimacy in Timor-Leste, Nepal, and Afghanistan. Legitimacy refers to the belief that authorities, institutions and social arrangements are appropriate and just, and is linked to long-term social stability. We have previously examined factors that may influence local perceptions of legitimacy from a social psychological perspective, with research variables including procedural justice, voice, and attributions of influence to particular groups. The first phase of this project (FA2386-08-1-4094) involved a large-scale analysis of existing textual data in each of the three countries. An interim grant (AOARD 104109) was then awarded for the purpose of establishing collaborative relationships with officials at local research agencies in Timor-Leste, Nepal and Afghanistan, who would provide advice with regard to local research context and assist with future fieldwork. The second aim of this interim grant was to secure IRB approval for fieldwork in Timor-Leste and Nepal and to begin the process of IRB approval in Afghanistan. Finally, the grant was intended to fund travel to each country to meet collaborators. At the end of the grant period of performance, collaborative links have been established with the Dili Institute of Technology in Timor-Leste, Interdisciplinary Analysts in Nepal, and Manasia Research Institute in Afghanistan, and a full ethics submission awaits approval by AFOSR. Travel to each country will occur after the research protocol is approved by AFOSR. Results from both Phase 1A and 1B have readied the team for fieldwork in Nepal and Timor-Leste (Phase 2) and Afghanistan (Phase 3) and laid both the theoretical and practical groundwork for nationwide surveys with over 9000 participants across all countries. This ongoing project will provide a reliable insight into the perceptions of locals in Timor-Leste, Nepal and Afghanistan regarding their government's legitimacy and inform post-conflict reconstruction strategies. This report outlines objectives, background, methodology, and project outcomes of Phase 1B, as well as projected outcomes for Phases 2 and 3, followed by an appendix of summarised results from Phase 1A.

Keywords: post-conflict, reconstruction, peacebuilding, domestic legitimacy, Timor-Leste, Nepal, Afghanistan, content analysis, evaluation, procedural justice, voice

Introduction

Domestic perceptions of legitimacy are essential for social stability. When legitimacy exists in the thinking of people and groups, it leads them to defer to authorities, institutions and social arrangements as right and proper (Tyler 2006). Legitimacy encourages voluntary cooperation, i.e., compliance with laws and policies due to the belief it is the 'right thing to do', rather than being motivated by anticipation of rewards or fear of consequences for non-compliance (Tyler 2006), and has an important bearing on local popular support for rebuilt institutional authorities such as the police, judiciary and government (Brinkerhoff 2005; Broadhurst and Bouhours 2008; Chesterman 2004; 2007; Paris & Sisk 2009; United Nations 2008). The perception of a government as legitimate can be linked to increased long-term stability, and the perception of a government as illegitimate to decreased long-term stability. This means that establishing legitimacy is particularly important in fragile post-conflict states.

Empirical evaluations of post-conflict reconstruction efforts have largely been neglected, with studies mainly derived from descriptive analysis of reforms rather than assessments of their actual impact (Pino & Waitrowski 2006). This project is significant in that at completion it will have provided a reliable insight into the perceptions of locals in Timor-Leste, Nepal and Afghanistan regarding their country's conflict, the process of post-conflict reconstruction, and their perceptions of institutional legitimacy. It will provide an up-to-date assessment of levels of government legitimacy and the complex psychological mechanisms underpinning these perceptions. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for states and agencies whose priority it is to rebuild and sustain functioning governments that promote long-term stability and peace.

An initial phase of research for this project involved text-mining software to analyse local, official, and academic perceptions in Timor-Leste, Nepal, and Afghanistan via existing text sources. This provided the research team with a number of variables of interest for in country fieldwork, including procedural justice, voice, attributions of group influence, strength of national identity, and citizen's motivational posturing towards the government.

The most recent phase of research was necessary for building relationships with local agencies in each country for the purposes of completing the fieldwork. This process involved information sharing, cultural advice, questionnaire design, and provisions for local IRB approval. The interim grant was also for the purpose of ensuring ethical approval in Brisbane (University of Queensland ethics approval), with the aim of lodging a full ethics application to AFOSR headquarters. Finally, the funding provided for travel to both Nepal and Timor-

Leste for the purpose of meeting collaborators in-person, as well as travel to Singapore to meet with the collaborators for the Afghanistan fieldwork.

Methodology

The two fieldwork sites were selected from a potential pool of several countries, including Timor- Leste, Cambodia, Vanuatu, the Philippines, and the Solomon Islands. The results of Phase 1A and 1B of this project further informed the appropriateness of site selection that included an initial analysis of textual sources and the completion of two reports: *Rebuilding institutional legitimacy in post-conflict societies: An Asia-Pacific case study* (Fisk, Cherney, Hornsey & Smith 2009) and *Rebuilding institutional legitimacy in post-conflict societies: A case study of Afghanistan* (Fisk, Cherney, Hornsey & Smith 2010), and resulted in the selection of Timor-Leste, Nepal, and Afghanistan as the fieldwork sites. A summary of the results of this prior research may be found in Appendix A.

To conduct informed fieldwork in post-conflict societies, it is important to work closely with researchers “on the ground” in each site. During the current phase of research, potential collaborating agencies and individuals were sourced in each country on the basis of the following criteria:

- Previous experience with large-scale social science research;
- Word-of-mouth recommendation;
- Prior academic publication standards;
- Resources to allow nationwide fieldwork with a team of research assistants;
- Extensive knowledge of on-the-ground security considerations;
- Provision of appropriate financial quote for fieldwork;
- Willingness to collaborate with Australian researchers and accept US Department of Defence funding.

It was explained that collaborators would be expected to contribute to survey materials, give advice on cultural and security issues, aid translation of the questionnaire into local dialects, assist in the training of research assistants to administer survey material, help with data entry, analysis, and final report writing. The steps involved in fieldwork are as follows:

1. **Targeted community survey.** This stage will involve a large-scale survey of randomly selected respondents in selected sites. The aim will be to measure the concept of institutional legitimacy via a number of variables (e.g. trust and confidence in police army, judiciary and government). The survey will test the relationship between perceptions of institutional legitimacy and variables as outlined above, such as procedural justice, affiliation of group influences, distributive justice, perception of legitimacy, and motivational postures.

2. **Follow-up interviews.** This phase will involve exploring in greater depth the perceptions of institutional legitimacy among community members. Face-to-face interviews will be conducted with a sub-sample of 100 respondents drawn from the community survey in post-conflict sites. The interviews will focus on obtaining more detailed information about factors shaping respondents' perceptions of institutional legitimacy, for example their reasoning processes around issues to do with governmental performance and accountability and the capacity of reconstruction efforts to enhance such practices.

In return, collaborators would receive financial compensation, information sharing and acknowledgment of their contribution on any resultant publications and reports. Thus collaborators were found who would work with the research team on local IRB approval, as well as a commitment to Phases 2 (Timor-Leste, Nepal) and 3 (Afghanistan) of this project.

The second aim of this grant period of performance was to obtain the materials necessary to lodge a full ethical application to AFOSR. Necessary materials were obtained in accordance with Department of Health and Human Services policy for human subject use, in addition to correspondence with Stephanie A. Bruce (CPIA, CIP), at AFOSR, who pre-approved materials such as informed consent documents and local research approval letters. An application was made to the relevant University of Queensland IRB, consisting of a protocol and local research context for the fieldwork. IRB requirements were explained to local collaborators, who were also given a draft protocol, draft survey materials, and informed consent documents for feedback.

Results and Discussion

Appropriate collaborators were found for each fieldwork site following assessment of several agencies. In Timor-Leste, the *Dili Institute of Technology* (<http://dit-tl.net/home>) was chosen following correspondence with the Rector of the Dili Institute of Technology, Estanislau Saldanha. Through the Centre for Applied Research and

Policy Studies, DIT has carried out research and professional consultancies for agencies including the World Bank, the International Republican Institute, the Canadian International Development Agency, UNICEF, as well as public opinion surveys for USAID. Their experience with large-scale nationwide surveys across a range of research areas made the Institute a suitable collaborator for this project. They are also able to provide research assistants in the form of undergraduate and postgraduate social science students, who through participate would enhance their own learning experience throughout their degrees. An essential component of the collaboration with Dili Institute of Technology will be sharing knowledge with these students regarding methodological processes and social science theory. In this way we will be increasing local participation and contributing to enhancing local research capabilities.

In Nepal, the chosen collaborator was *Interdisciplinary Analysts* (<http://www.ida.com.np/>), following correspondence with the Director, Dr Sudhindra Sharma. Individual researchers at Interdisciplinary Analysts have undertaken assignments for the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Ford Foundation, International Development Research Centre and USAID. Interdisciplinary Analysts has also been involved institutionally with organizations such as the UNCDF, UNDP, UNESCO, Department for International Development, Sustainable Development Commission, German Development Service, University of Helsinki, and the Agriculture University of Norway. Within Nepal, Interdisciplinary Analysts has worked with King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation, Office of the Auditor General of Nepal, Election Commission, the Nepal Police, Ministry of Water Resources and the Ministry of Environment. Interdisciplinary Analysts is an independent research institute, and will train professional research assistants to administer the questionnaires nationwide.

In Afghanistan, the chosen collaborator was *the Manasia Research and Analysis Institute* (<http://www.sepiasolutions.com/clients/mra/about.asp>), following a recommendation by Lt Col David Sonntag of AOARD, as well as correspondence with the Director of the Institute, Dr Riffat Manasia. Manasia Research and Analysis Institute specialize in large-scale nationwide fieldwork involving both qualitative and quantitative research, and has worked previously with the US Air Force and NATO, as well as local and international agencies. They operate via a network of Afghan workers located in each of the main six sub-regions of Afghanistan, and place an emphasis on local knowledge and participation, an essential consideration for fieldwork in a country with security considerations such as Afghanistan.

Collaborators have agreed to provide the following services:

- providing input on local issues to inform the development of the survey instrument;
- working on the dialect translations to ensure accuracy;
- training research assistants to deliver face-to-face surveys to 3000 participants nationwide;
- data: collection, entering, cleaning and analysis;
- assistance with report writing.
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The second aim of this interim phase was to complete a final application for IRB approval for the fieldwork in Nepal and Timor-Leste, and to begin the process of IRB approval for fieldwork in Afghanistan. In-country IRB approval was sought through the method of 'local research approval', in which a representative authority within the country was given access to research materials and advised of the research protocol. They then provided an official letter acknowledging the benefits and risks of the research as well as the source of funding from the US Department of Defense, and approved the researchers' entry into the country for these purposes. Draft versions of the letter were sent to Stephanie Bruce at AFOSR for pre-approval. These approval letters were signed in Timor-Leste by Estanislau Saldanha, Rector of the Dili Institute of Technology; and in Nepal by Dr Sudhindra Sharma, Director of Interdisciplinary Analysts.

In line with the aims of this interim research phase, a full human subjects ethics application is currently under review by the AFOSR IRB. The content of this application is as follows:

- A research protocol approved by the Institutional Review Board of the School of Behavioral and Social Sciences at the University of Queensland (this IRB has Federalwide Assurance approval);
- Local research approval letters from the Director of Interdisciplinary Analysts in Nepal and Dili Institute of Technology, granting consent to foreign nationals entering the country for research purposes;
- Memo from the University of Queensland's IRB representative explaining how local research context was taken into consideration in approving the protocol;
- Department of Defence Addendum to Department of Health and Human Services Federalwide Assurance;
- Pre-approved informed consent documents;
- Draft questionnaire materials.

This submission was based on information provided via correspondence with Stephanie Bruce and is awaiting

final approval. Once approved, fieldwork in Nepal and Timor-Leste is ready to commence pending funding approval from AFOSR. Travel to these countries to meet collaborators will occur immediately following final AFOSR approval of the application.

A submission will be made to UQ's IRB regarding fieldwork in Afghanistan. At present this submission is waiting for a risk assessment from the collaborating agency in Afghanistan. Once approved, a similar application will be made to AFOSR as outlined above. There will be further ethical procedures given the 'in-theatre' nature of the work in Afghanistan, yet the exact process has been changing at AFOSR since the project began. We are now seeking up-to-date information regarding the procedures for human subjects clearance in Afghanistan. Stephanie Bruce is in communication with CENTCOM, who will provide the review of the security situation in Afghanistan and inform the procedure for in-country human subjects use. Initial feedback indicates this process to be less onerous than originally anticipated, though considerable variability may occur following the announcement of US and Coalition troop withdrawals from Afghanistan beginning December 2011. Nonetheless, it is anticipated that ethical clearance for human subjects in Afghanistan will be obtained during the period of fieldwork in Nepal and Timor-Leste.

Conclusion

This report summarised the progress made during the grant period of performance for AOARD project number 104109. Phase 1A involved textual analysis of various sources using Leximancer in order to inform fieldwork site selection, the development of a theoretical model, survey instrument design and the publication of preliminary results. Results from this Leximancer analysis allowed us to map factors associated with post-conflict institutional legitimacy in Timor-Leste, Nepal, and Afghanistan (Appendix A). Further, this phase offered the development of a potential new method for the evaluation of attitudes towards state institutions and the reconstruction process in post-conflict societies. Phase 1B (the current grant period) provided funding to enable IRB approval for on-site fieldwork. This phase involved consultations with local groups and agencies conducting research in Timor-Leste, Nepal and Afghanistan, resulting in collaborative links with local agencies that have advised on cultural issues and who will assist with the execution of the fieldwork. Results from both Phase 1A and 1B have prepared the team for fieldwork in Nepal and Timor-Leste (Phase 2) and Afghanistan (Phase 3) and laid both the theoretical and practical groundwork for nationwide surveys with over 6000 participants to allow us to discover factors influencing government legitimacy following post-conflict reconstruction. The period of

performance to date has provided the research team with a new theoretical model examining the social and political processes influencing legitimacy outcomes, and the practical means to test this theory through fieldwork.

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Appendix A: Executive Summary, Phase 1A (FA2386-08-1-4094).

The aim of Phase 1A was to examine the dimensional properties of legitimacy in East Timor, Nepal and Afghanistan via textual analysis of various sources (academic, official, and primary). These results were used to understand the configuration of post-conflict reconstruction strategies in these selected sites and help define legitimacy processes. Results were also used to inform preparation for subsequent phases of research that will involve fieldwork in selected sites.

Domestic legitimacy refers to the acceptance and trust of post-conflict interventions and resulting institutions among the local population, which has been identified as influencing the sustainability of peacebuilding programs. This is important to the functioning of governmental institutions (e.g. police, judiciary and government) that post-conflict reconstruction is particularly concerned with transforming – often referred to as statebuilding.

This project focuses on two factors proposed to influence domestic legitimacy: voice and social identity. Voice refers to the opportunity for groups to have some level of input into processes that affect them. Voice provides for some level of local control and is premised on notions of local accountability and participation in the reconstruction process. This is essential for ensuring that reconstruction efforts are perceived as meeting local needs and expectations.

Social identities are attitudes, values, behaviours and memories that are drawn from group membership. Group membership acts as a heuristic that tells people who can be trusted and who cannot, independent of any history of interpersonal exchange. Since citizens draw assumptions about which groups are responsible for rebuilding or reforming institutions, the social identity of reconstruction agents may affect perceptions of trust and legitimacy.

Results from East Timor were characterised by a disjunction between the ideals of academic literature, the aims of reconstruction programs, and the perception of the reality on the ground. The academic literature discussed legitimacy with equal attention across a broad range of institutions, including economic, health, and security, whereas the official literature focused on government, and the primary literature on human rights and the judiciary, indicating potential different assessments of the relative importance of these institutions to reconstruction efforts. The presence of Timorese individuals such as Xanana Gusmao on primary profiles but not

academic or official, suggests an underestimation of the power of the individual to influence perceptions of legitimacy via what can be term charismatic authority. Though building participation and increasing voice is discussed in the academic literature and explicitly stated as an objective in the official literature, East Timorese still struggle with the impression of having little influence over the rebuilding of key institutions, especially within the context of key justice institutions such as the judicial system. This leads to perceptions of systemic bias and ineffectiveness, which thereby undermines domestic legitimacy. There is a strong indication that a lack of trust regarding Australia's involvement in the reconstruction of East Timor affected the legitimacy of UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Authority in East Timor), with suspicion of Australia's motives as an out-group with disproportionate political power over Timor. Special issues raised in the East Timor profiles and worthy of further investigation include: the ill-conceived choosing of Portuguese as the national language; perceptions of transitional justice following Indonesia's Truth and Reconciliation Commission; repercussions following the distribution of revenue from the Timor Petroleum Fund; and justice processes utilising customary norms versus a reliance on rebuilt judicial institutions.

In general there were similar issues raised in Nepal, though analysis of social identity processes were more pronounced and complicated by the intricate socio-cultural system. Disentangling the relative importance of group identities in Nepal will be essential in any subsequent fieldwork. The academic profile was the only source to discuss the importance of NGO legitimacy, with the official and primary profiles more concerned with human rights and official corruption. As in East Timor, voice was a concept raised in all sources, though its discussion in the academic texts and stated importance in official sources was at odds with direct claims in the primary text of the marginalisation and denial of voice of certain groups. This finding is also at odds with the prediction that the primarily locally based reconstruction efforts and governance in Nepal would increase the perception of ownership and participation. It is possible that systemic exclusion of ethnicities and castes from the decision-making process has counteracted the positive effects of perceived devolution of ownership overall in Nepal. Special issues raised in the legitimacy profiles and worthy of further research include: the importance of the urban/rural distinction in Nepal; the legitimacy of NGOs given their prolific and significant role in reconstruction; integration of ex-Maoist insurgents into the police and military and its effect on domestic legitimacy; and perceptions of the US in Nepal given the Communist political philosophy of the Maoist government.

Suspicious of outsiders and their motives in both countries, both at the stage of the international intervention and subsequently in reconstruction. This was exacerbated when the US or another high-status group were operating in the country in question. Locals in East Timor and Nepal were generally accepting of initial United Nations involvement, though it was evident that this support began to deteriorate over time due to the increased perception that foreign governments were “pulling the strings” of the operation. An overriding transitional authority as in the case of UNTAET aggravates the latter problem, where it can be viewed on the ground as operating on behalf of foreign governments, causing locals to overlook the humanitarian need for the involvement of international agencies. Surveys and interviews in subsequent phases of this project will determine the reasoning processes behind these perceptions, though it seems fair to conclude at this stage that there are social identity processes at work in the innate distrust of particular out-groups as represented by international agencies and their representatives in both East Timor and Nepal.

While academics and reconstruction officials work on building institutions, locals are often left searching for a sense of justice for grievances experienced during the preceding and often ongoing conflict. Tied to this concept are issues of accountability and fairness, central to perceptions of domestic legitimacy. Independent investigations and war crimes tribunals are typically conducted in post-conflict environments with locals and officials placing emphasis on the extent to which these processes accord to procedural justice norms, with a lack of perceived legitimacy in the conduct of trials undermining their aims of providing local justice. It will be interesting to investigate further in East Timor and Nepal whether locals prefer retributive or restorative justice processes after conflict. However, these initial findings suggest that leaving war criminals unpunished is a major setback for the legitimacy of the judicial system and the government after conflict.

This project also assessed perceptions of legitimacy in Afghanistan, where conflict is ongoing and escalating, whilst rebuilding efforts are simultaneously occurring. We sought to examine, through detailed content analysis, a series of issues and concepts related to the success of post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan. The use of multiple text sources (academic, UN and NGOs, Afghanistan government, soldiers deployed in Afghanistan and local civilians) aimed to highlight inconsistencies or consensus between different groups playing a role in the occupation and reconstruction of Afghanistan. Broad concepts examined were security and governance (including corruption, opium trade, and governmental centralisation), which were found in initial analyses to be prolifically represented across all text sources. As in Timor-Leste and Nepal, specific social psychology variables investigated were social identity and voice, which were examined in terms of their effect on legitimacy in

Afghanistan. Together, these analyses allowed insight into factors affecting trust in institutions, as well as those that erode or encourage the perception of domestic legitimacy.

Security was discussed amongst all texts as a means of obtaining legitimacy, as it indicates the ability of the government to provide one of the basic services of a functioning state. Electoral security was identified across text sources as important, as violence and intimidation decreased perceptions of participation and ownership, and undermined the legitimacy of the subsequently formed government. Local sources revealed that although the international security presence in Kabul was a source of local dispossession and loss of ownership, these same forces were recognised as essential in containing violence, and even encouraged by locals to expand peacekeeping operations further into rural areas.

President Harmid Karzai was invariably viewed as weak and corrupt, a perception that eroded his authority and undermined the institutions he represents. Distrust in government operated at both the global and specific level, with locals expressing suspicion of both the powerful central government due to its distance from their lives, as well as local power-holders with whom they have firsthand experience of corrupt practices. The perception of corruption in Afghanistan was exacerbated by the incorporation of former warlords into the Karzai government, as well as government participation in the opium trade.

Social identity factors encouraged suspicion of certain groups across multiple lines including national, ethnic, religious and geographical province. Particularly problematic out-groups included Iraq, which was perceived to hold the predominant amount of public attention and resources, and Pakistan, which was often viewed as a destabilizing force in Afghanistan. Due to the explicit US involvement in occupation and reconstruction, the perception persisted that the Karzai government is a puppet of Western forces, despite a relatively successful initial democratic election.

Finally, the role of voice was examined, within which the most important issue was free and fair elections, a direct source of local participation. Additionally contributing to perceptions of voice were the Afghan traditions of *shuras* and *jirgas* (consultations meetings). Some effort has been made on behalf of international forces to maintain these traditions, and they should be considered an essential component of increasing local perceptions of inclusion and participation. Processes of fairness and inclusion are essential for the legitimacy of institutions, and

the failings in these processes as described in the texts will greatly affect both domestic and international perceptions of the Afghanistan state.

Empirical evaluations of post-conflict reconstruction efforts have largely been neglected, with studies mainly derived from descriptive analysis of reforms rather than assessments of their actual impact (Pino & Waitrowski 2006). This project is significant in that at completion it will have produced an evidence-based contribution to the post-conflict reconstruction literature. It represents a novel application of existing social psychology and social science theory, grounded in a new theoretical model and measured in a real-world setting.

This ongoing project will provide a reliable insight into the perceptions of locals in Timor-Leste, Nepal and Afghanistan regarding their country's conflict and the process of post-conflict reconstruction. It will provide an up-to-date assessment of levels of government legitimacy and the complex psychological mechanisms underpinning these perceptions. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for states and agencies whose priority it is to rebuild and sustain functioning governments that promote long-term stability and peace.